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**Transforming Education & Renewing the Gaeltacht**

**Education**: ReSource has been engaged in ongoing exciting work in relation to moving the education system in the more creative direction that was the aim of the Symposium ‘Towards a More Creative Education System’ hosted by the college in 2018 and which gave rise to a number of systemic initiatives. This work has involved: (i) influencing the terms of the debate for a Citizens Assembly for Education (CAFÉ) which grew out of the symposium and (ii) facilitating discussions at local school level through the BEACONS process (also a product of the symposium) under the aegis of the Teaching Council about how education can better meet the needs of students, parents and teachers.

**Gaeltacht Resilience**: ReSource has also been laying the groundwork for a creative assembly at the college to address how a more resilient Gaeltacht system can arrest and reverse the decline of this vital language community.

**ReSource Model**: In all of its work ReSource brings an approach that combines creativity, deep listening, empathy and attention to the potential for systemic change that this moment holds. Our aim is to make the most of the special gifts that an art college in a special place is uniquely positioned to offer.

**Citizens Assembly for Education (CAFÉ)**

Viewing the Citizens Assembly for Education (CAFÉ) as a staging post - rather than a destination - in a long-term transformation process in the education system, our work as actors outside the state system is to help orchestrate the wider context of societal understanding that will allow an unstoppable momentum for change to build before, during and after CAFÉ proper. In preparation for the hosting of the assembly which is now expected to take place in the latter half of 2022, there are three major strands to our work:

* **National Conversation**: Recognising that change in a system as innately conservative as education requires buy-in from wider society and the political system, we are in the early stages of cultivating a national conversation so as to condition the context in which the citizens’ assembly will take place. Already, with the help of a support group with whom we have hosted a series of consultations, we have secured several articles in the Irish Times and Sunday Independent, mostly centring on the need to reform the leaving cert. Discussions with the Irish Times are progressing for the launch of a series of pod-casts and articles on the future of education in the lead up to CAFÉ, possibly starting in early 2022.
* **Working with the System**: Secondly we have been cultivating good relationships with the key departments of Education and the Taoiseach as well as with the political system more generally. Through regular meetings we have sown the idea that the CAFÉ needs to start by interrogating the big question of the purpose of education in the 21st century context as a necessary prerequisite for addressing specific issues such as inclusion, assessment, life-long learning, global citizenship etc.
* **Hosting Conversations**: Finally we have launched a series of conversations that allow the voice of the constituent elements in education to inform the planning for the citizen’s assembly process. To date we have hosted conversations with students in early and initial teacher education and with teacher educators and will continue the process with parents, students, teachers and those on the margins. We are sharing the harvest of the conversations with the Department of Education so as to inform and shape the planning for CAFE.

**BEACONS**

[BEACONS](https://www.teachingcouncil.ie/en/about-us1/beacons/) (Bringing Education Alive for Communities on a National Scale) is an initiative of the Teaching Council that was also born at the 2018 Symposium at the Burren College of Art. Starting out as a creative process for enlisting the voices of students, parents and teachers across a range or primary and secondary schools in particular areas about what education means for them, this has now also become a vehicle for exploring the particular needs of schools in multi-ethnic communities, in DEIS schools, inner-city schools and in special-needs schools.

ReSource, in its role on the advisory board and as the provider of facilitation and reporting services for the process, has been instrumental in growing the ambition of the project and facilitating its effective migration online during Covid-19. It has also been foregrounding the potential of BEACONS as a bottom-up process that can shape and inform the Citizens Assembly for Education. With EU funding and in conjunction with OECD the process is now destined to grow significantly in scale in a process that will reveal whether the model can be implemented elsewhere to inform policy-formation and implementation.

**A Symposium on Gaeltacht Resilience**

ReSource as the socially-engaged out-reach arm of the Burren College of Art is at its most potent when combining the power of place, creative facilitation, welcome and safe space to convene and host system representatives for deep dive conversations on issues of systemic import. This approach had its origins in the trans-Atlantic 2013 Climate Gathering which addressed the vexed issue of how to communicate climate change effectively. The model was refined in the 2018 Symposium on education.

We are now planning, subject to covid-19 restrictions, to convene representatives of the Gaeltacht communities and the related organs of the state for an autumn symposium that will look at how to arrest and reverse the decline of this language-speaking community. As with the education symposium the process has started with extensive listening to the voices of Gaeltacht communities. Artists and facilitators have been enlisted for a project which many feel instinctively is vital to a sense of national identity in an era of globalisation and change as we approach the centenary of the foundation of the Irish state. The output of the symposium will inform government thinking on the future of the Gaeltacht and the language.

In seeding new initiatives and such as the Gaeltacht symposium ReSource is working with complexity and emergence in the knowledge that while intentionality is critical, the precise contours of what will emerge from creative work will often only become apparent after the event. Surprise, seeing with fresh eyes and openings to new possibility are the rewards for the willingness to let go and embrace the unknown that is seeking to be born.

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